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H O R T A C C O U N T
O F T H E
M O T I V E S
W H I C H D E T E R M I N E D T H E M A N,
C A L L E D
J O H N T H E P A I N T E R;
A N D
J U S T I F I C A T I O N O F H I S C O N D U C T;

W R I T T E N B Y H I M S E L F,
A n d s e n t t o h i s F R I E N D, M r. A. T O M K I N S,
W I T H A R E Q U E S T T O P U B L I S H I T A F T E R H I S E X E C U T I O N.

-----One Murder made a VILLAIN,
Millions a HERO!----Princes were privileg'd
To kill, and Numbers sanctified the Crime.

Right Reverend Dr. P O R T E U S,
Now LORD BISHOP of CHESTER,

L O N D O N.

by JOHN WILLIAMS, No. 39, Fleet Street. It may also be had of the Book-
sellers at Portsmouth, Winchester, Southampton, Bristol, and Salisbury.

M,DCC,LXXVII.



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SHORT ACCOUNT, &c.

Was born to no fortune. My parents, who were honest, industrious tradesfolk, did not however suffer me to grow up without some education. The master of a neighbouring country school taught me to read and write, and my own inclination led me to study all the books which fell in my way, and were not above my comprehension.

I thought it necessary to mention this much, to prevent any surprize in the learned reader, who will find in the few following pages some marks of historical and other reading. The reasoning he will meet is such as any man in such circumstances as mine must have used to

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give him courage enough to undertake the boldest attempt that has been made for many years.

And before I enter upon the motives which determined me to this great action, I would beg the people of England to lay down their prejudices for a moment. My blood is some attonement for my crime, if it was one. If not, (and I hope I shall be able to shew it was not) though the Courts of Law have condemned my body to death, the people ought not to pass a like sentence on my fame.

Being born an American, I considered America and England, whilst they were united, as my native country; and from the time I first began to think the love of my country was my ruling passion, I would have run any risque, faced any danger, to do my country a service. Had there been a war between England and France upon just grounds, I am persuaded I would as soon, nay sooner, have entered Brest and Toulon, to do our natural enemies a mischief, than I did Portsmouth to burn the Dock; and that I would on such an occasion as little dread the *French* wheel as before my trial I feared the *English* gallows.

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And in this spirit of serving my country, all the good books I ever read confirmed me. To be accounted an hero after one's death, seemed to me to be better than to wear a crown during one's life. For as the wise man saith, "The things of this world pass away quickly." What signifies worldly grandeur, when such vile men as Nero, and Domitian, and Caligula, in old Rome, or as Henry the 8th, or James the 1st, or Richard the 3d, of England, wore purple garments, and were called Kings and Emperors? Who would not rather be old Codrus, or Cato, or such a man as our Mr. Sydney, who bled upon Tower-hill for defending Liberty and the Protestant Religion, than any one of that nasty groupe? To be sure the Kings slept upon softer beds, and fed upon richer meats, and drunk better wine, and more of it, than the Patriots, but then mankind do not look up to them now, and blefs them, as their guardians and benefactors.

So that a good name appeared to me to be better than riches. To get this good name in a very high degree I thought we must render some very great service to our country. No opportunity offered till the breaking out of the war between *America* and *England*.

Before I bound myself to either side, I endeavoured to examine (as the merry Mr. Stephens bids us) both sides of the question. I thought it hard of the government here to tax the Americans (my countrymen) without their consent, particularly as they did not refuse to tax themselves. I thought it still harder, instead of hearth money collectors, excise and custom-house officers, and the other people who gather government money, that soldiers should be sent across, to turn their pockets inside out, and shake all the money there into the ---s. And what was still the hardest of all, government shut up their harbours, took away their fisheries, and sent twenty or forty thousand innocent people to beg or starve.

As my countrymen were Englishmen in every sense of the word, they resolved to lose all their blood sooner than any of their liberties. They took up arms. And when they were on the right side, and had JUSTICE with them, I declared for the liberties of the Colonies, and determined to die free, sooner than live a slave.

As soon as the armies on both sides came to action, and I saw the havoc of my countrymen, my blood boiled within me. Poor Jack Turner, who was both good and

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charitable, who had married a wife he loved, and had five young children, I saw him with his skull broken, and his brains knocked out with a Hessian musquet.

To mention all I saw, to reckon up all the brave men who perished on both sides, would make any good Christian's heart ache. God forgive the men who begun this war, and begin every war without good reason! To see the poor people flying from the coast to the back settlements, and turning every now and then to see their houses in a flame, to see the steeples and churches, the market-place, the squares and streets of the cities they dwelt so long in, set on fire by the soldiers, and blazing at once up to Heaven---I say again, God forgive those who can deal so inhumanly with their fellow creatures!

I confess I was not at that time so charitable in my wishes for the enemies of America. Our sufferings enraged me. I determined to do some notable action, that would shew how much I loved my country. I even then determined, as the force of England consists chiefly in their shipping, to strike them to the very heart, by burning the stores at Portsmouth.

How I miscarried in my attempt---how I was tried for it, and was convicted of it, would be needless to mention here, as the public papers have already spread the account through *England, Ireland, Scotland, and America.*

It is natural for the people here to condemn the action ; but not more just than in the followers of *Porfenna*, King of some little territory in *Italy*, to blame the gallant Roman who entered *Porfenna's* camp in disguise, with an intention of assassinating him. Our motives were the same. He attacked the King, who was an enemy to *Rome*. I attempted to burn the magazine, that would be ruinous to *America*. Love of country was the motive of both ; of me, *John Moxam* ; of him, *Mutius Scavola*. And they who approve the act of that great-minded Roman, cannot, without inconsistency, condemn mine.

It is certain to any one who considers without prejudice, that my motives must be as pure, and my resolution as fixed and heroic, as those of any of the great men of antiquity. *Curtius*, who rode down the gulph, did not go to more certain destruction than I. *Codrus*, who pro-

provoked the enemy's centinel to stab him, did not court destruction more surely. They were victims offered up for their country's good---noble ones indeed! and so was I. But with this difference.

When *Curtius* entered the gulph, a crowd of Romans stood on the brink of the precipice, applauding the spirit of the young hero, and panting for a share in his glory. How must his heart have swelled with honest pride to contemplate his great superiority over such a nation as the Roman! and to consider, if he had time in that moment of self-congratulation, that he would be proposed, as a model of generous patriotism, not only to the youth of his own country, but to men of all ranks in all quarters of the world!

This was a reward I had not. No one stood by to applaud my act. I was in the country of an enemy. The people of this country too heated against me and my countrymen. No favour, no affection, either to the part performed, or the principles upon which I acted. On the contrary, I must be esteemed and punished as a criminal by the laws of this country. The people would abhor me for an attempt to injure their navy. I had no place

place to look for comfort but in my own heart. That indeed told me I was a lover of my country, and an heroic one ; that I underwent much fatigue, expence, and danger, for the sake of advancing the freedom of my country, and checking the power that would take our liberties from us.

I would be extremely concerned to commit any thing rashly, which had not a foundation of justice. If the Ministry here burned our harbours, we could not be wrong in doing an harm to theirs. If they burned our towns, and slaughtered our people, we had an equal right to burn their cities, and slaughter their inhabitants. Whatever injury they offered the Continent, we had a right to retaliate on Great Britain.

I know there are many who will make a foolish distinction between the act of armies, and of a single man, as one. They will say it was base and treacherous to come into their country privily, with an intention of doing it an injury ; and a great deal more of the same kind.

To those I will answer, that the world has judged always wrongly in this point. Do beating drums, and flying colours, purge a band of robbers and murderers of all guilt? Does it signify as to the nature of the crime, whether he who commits it wears a red coat or a brown? whether he holds a painter's brush in his hand, or a general's truncheon? An army may be called an army; but if this army fights in an *unjust* cause, cuts the throats, and plunders the houses of a people, every man in this army who assists in this *unjust* cause, is not more or less than a murderer and a robber. A *reasonable Judge*, with sufficient power, would hang up every man of them.

As to my coming privily into the country, it shews that our side cannot do things openly and above board, as the Ministry do. Why can they not? Because they are not strong enough. Their weakness shews very evidently I think that they would not give the first stroke in this war, (Anglici rebellion) but that they were boxed and provoked before they would venture to return the blow. Now they did not give the first blow, and were not strong enough to resent it in the field, what were they to do? Were they to sit quiet and say, "Do, gentlemen, demolish our towns, burn or take our ships, kill our people, To seize our grounds, and do with us what you please. We

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cannot meet you *fairly* in the field, and we will take no other method of redressing ourselves."

If a robber broke into my house, with an intent to plunder it, and kill all my family, would I make it a point of honour to call this robber out as a gentleman? Would I, when I knew him to be a much stronger man, better armed, and more expert in the management of his weapons, give him a *fair* chance? I should be thought a madman if I did not take any advantage of him; if I did not stab him in the dark, when an opportunity presented itself.

And now, when America is invaded, as it appears to me, (and to many of *the greatest men in England* beside me) unjustly, are we, because our armies are not so large, nor so well armed or disciplined as the *English*, and their clean-handed friends the *Hessians*---are we, I say, to sit down, and suffer our throats to be cut tamely? Every American, who believes his cause to be a just one, ought to exert himself in whatever way he can be serviceable to his country. If in the field, let him carry arms; if not, let him light a torch. His enemies surround him. If he cannot destroy them by open force, he must by stratagem,

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And now, since this world is almost past, and another approaches, may I be received according to my deserts. I have meant honestly, and acted in my own apprehension gloriously. If my heart acquits me, I value at very little the verdict of a jury. My generous countrymen will weep blood over me. My name shall be famous in their annals to all eternity. My soul shall be shortly in the hand of him who made it. Let if the executors of the law wreak what vengeance they please on my body, I am satisfied in my own conscience, and in that persuasion leave the world whenever it shall please God to call me out of it. May he be merciful to me! as my intentions were upright.

Amen.

Thus I hope I have answered people who would have found no fault in me, had I fought in America, and died a common soldier. But they think it monstrous, and terrible, and I do not know what, to attempt to burn the Dock at Portsmouth, not considering how many ships, and towns, and ships of ours, have been burned, and their soldiers in America.

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The more I think upon what I have done, the better am I pleased. I die, as the greatest men have died, in attempting, without success, to serve my country. My death gives me very little trouble. Life is at best but short. A fall of the gravel, a fever, a fall from an horse, the most vulgar disorder, the most common accident, may end it. Besides, what was life to such a man as me, without something to distinguish it?

The gentleman of the House of Commons, who thinks he does wonders when he raises the price of his conscience a few pounds more than he could in reality expect for it, may laugh at me for such notions. So doubt will the merchant, who spends his whole life cheating and over-reaching, not in serving and benefiting the country to which he belongs. I do not care a rush for the opinions of such men. Let the courtier go on and lick up the spittle of the Minister or his underling. Let the rich Alderman doze over his accounts in the morning, and his turtle at night. I would rather die on the gallows for such a crime, (as it will perhaps be called) than live like such poor creatures, to die at last of a plague or a surfeit.

The people of England may perhaps condemn my action as a very vile one. The Americans will extol it as a very noble. I may be cursed here as a very bold, infamous fellow. There I shall be sung about through the towns and villages, as a martyr to my country. Here I may be gibbeted and frighten crows; there a grateful people will erect statues to their PATRIOT, and remember my name with honour. I do not value the reproaches of the people here, because they are the reproaches of a people sliding into -----; I would wish to have the praises of the Americans, because they love freedom.

Beside, if people find fault with the TREACHERY, as I now some will, let them consider that treachery and underhand dealing did not begin on our side; let them remember a certain LORD who acted the first deceit practised on either side; him I mean who forged the notes of the Congress. His treachery was as great, nay greater than mine, as I can prove very clearly.

For what could I burn at Portsmouth, which some cash could not repair? Had I forged a draught or draughts on the Bank of England to the amount of the

stores in Portsmouth, the loss to the nation must be as great as if those stores were burned. I do not know, upon a nice calculation, whether it would not be greater.

But the right honourable and the right honest Lord who forged the paper money of America, might have held on his hand to the highest amount, if he had not been detected in time. The loss to America must have been greater, as they are more poor and more unprovided than the English in all things. The forgery was more base and more cowardly than the attempt to fire the Docks. He ran no risk. But the burning of Portsmouth could not be done without the greatest danger.

But if, instead of burning Portsmouth, we were at war with France, and I had set fire to the magazines at Brest, what a glorious fellow people would think me! There is not a porter or punch house in London where my health would not be toasted. Brave John the Painter would be the word! and all England would ring with it.

Now

Now that I have attempted to serve my country truly, and after the example of the greatest men in history, a few of whom I have mentioned, and many more I could mention, the *English* will curse me as a traitor. So would the *Puritans* have cursed *Colonel Rumsey* (I think that's his name) if he had attempted to assassinate *Oliver Cromwell*; and so would the *Etrurians* have cursed *Scavola* if he had succeeded in killing their King *Porfenna*. Why? Because *Cromwell* was a convenience to his party---*Porfenna* to his kingdom. But REASON, that has nothing to win or lose, will speak without prejudice, and say, that the acts of those two men were heroic. Why? Because the attempt was made in favour of their country. This same REASON will likewise say, that my attempt, however disagreeable and inconvenient to the *English*, will shine as much as either in history. The *English* cannot be impartial judges of my conduct. Their interest is a stumbling block to their reason. They stand in the same point of view as the *Puritans* and the *Etrurians* above-mentioned.

